

TABERNACLE PULPIT.

DR. TALMAGE PREACHES A SERMON
ON THE MENDING OF NETS.

Christians should look to it that their nets for souls are kept in good order—some hints that will be of value.

BROOKLYN, May 17.—If proof of Dr. Talmage's immense popularity had been needed it would be amply furnished by the promptitude with which the people have availed themselves of the increased accommodation afforded by the new Tabernacle. The vast edifice is as densely crowded as any service as the other and smaller Tabernacles were. The morning service paid his attention to the theological disputes which are agitating the churches, and as usual gave sound practical advice to both parties. His text was Matthew 13: 47: "James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets."

"I go a-fishing," cried Simon Peter to his comrades, and the most of the apostles had hands hard from fishing tackle. The same sort of world have always attracted attention. In the third century the queen of Egypt had for pin money four hundred and seventy thousand dollars, received from the fisheries of Lake Moeris. And if the time should ever come when the immensity of the world's population could not be fed by the vegetables and meats of the land, the sea has an amount of animal life that would feed all the populations of the earth, and furnish them with a food by its phosphorus would make a generation braving and intellectual beyond anything that the world has ever imagined. My text takes us among the Galilean fishermen. One day Walter Scott, while hunting in an old drawer, found among some old fishing tackle the manuscript of his immortal book "Waverley," which he had put away there as of no worth, and who knows but that day we may find some unknown wealth of thought while looking at the fishing tackle in the text?

PUT YOUR NETS IN GOOD ORDER. It is not a good day for fishing, and three men are in the boat repairing the broken fishing net. If you are fishing with a hook and line and the fish will not bite it is a good time to put the angler's apparatus into better condition. Perhaps the last fish you hauled in was so large that something snapped. Or, when you were fishing with a net there was a mighty sounding of the scales, or an exposed nail on the side of the boat which broke some of the threads and let part or all of the captives of the deep escape into their natural element. And hardly anything is more provoking than to nearly land a score or a hundred of trophies from the deep and when you are in the full glee of hauling in the spotted treasures through some imperfection of the net they splash back into the wave.

That is too much of a trial of patience for most fishermen to endure, and many a man ordinarily correct of speech in such circumstances comes to an intensity of utterance unjustifiable. Therefore no good fisherman considers the time wasted that is spent in mending his net. Now the Bible again and again represents Christian workers as fishermen, and we are fishing with a net there was a mighty sounding of the scales, or an exposed nail on the side of the boat which broke some of the threads and let part or all of the captives of the deep escape into their natural element. And hardly anything is more provoking than to nearly land a score or a hundred of trophies from the deep and when you are in the full glee of hauling in the spotted treasures through some imperfection of the net they splash back into the wave.

The trouble with many of our nets is that the meshes are too large. If a fish can get his gills and half his body through the network, he takes his liberty and goes his way out and leaves the place through which he swarmed a tangle of broken threads. The Bible weaves faith and works tight together, the law and the Gospel, righteousness and forgiveness. Some of our nets have meshes so wide that the sinner floats in and out and is not at any moment caught for the heavenly landing. In our desire to make everything so easy, we relax, we loosen, we widen. We let men after they are once in the Gospel net escape into the world and go into indulgence and swim all around Galilee, from north side to south side and from east side to west side, expecting that they will come back again. We ought to make it easy for them to get into the kingdom of God, and, as far as we can, make it impossible for them to get out.

The poor advice nowadays to many is: "Go and do just as you feel." You are captured for God and heaven. The net was not intended to be any restraint or any hindrance. What you did before you were a Christian, do now. Go to all styles of amusement, read all the styles of books, engage in all the styles of behavior as before you were converted." And so through these meshes of permissiveness and laxity they wriggle out through this opening and that opening, tearing the net as they go, and soon all the fish that we expected to land in heaven before we knew it are back in the deep sea of the world. Oh, when we go a-gospel fishing let us make it as easy as possible for souls to get in, and as hard as possible to get out.

BE A CHRISTIAN EVERY DAY. Is the Bible language an unmeaning verbiage when it talks about self denial and keeping the body under, and about walking the narrow way and entering the strait gate, and about carrying the cross? Is there any mystery in telling whether a man is a Christian except by his taking the communion chalice on sacramental day? May a man be as reckless about his thoughts, about his words, about his feelings, about his conversion as before conversion? One-half the Gospel text with which we have been scolding the sea, have had such wide meshes that they have been all torn pieces by the rushing out into the world of those whom a tighter net would have kept in. The only use of a net is to keep the fish from going back to where they were before and taking them where they could not have been taken by any other means. Alas, that the words of Christ are so little heeded when he said, "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." The church is fast becoming as bad as the world, and when it gets as bad as the world it will be worse than the world by so much as it will add hypocrisy of a most appalling kind to its other defects.

Furthermore, many of our nets are torn to pieces by being entangled with other nets. It is a sad sight to see fishermen fighting about sea room and pulling in opposite directions, each to get his net, both nets damaged by the struggle and losing all the fish. In a city like this of more than eight hundred thousand, there are at least five hundred thousand not in Sabbath schools or churches. And in this land where there are more than sixty-four million people, there are at least thirty million not in the Sabbath schools and churches. And in this world of more than four hundred million people, there are at least eight hundred million not in schools and churches. Is such an Atlantic ocean of opportunity there is room for all the nets and all the boats and all the fishermen and for all the fish?

There should be no rivalry between churches. Each one does a work peculiar

to itself. There should be no rivalry between ministers. God never repeats himself, and he never makes two ministers alike, and each one has a work that no other man in the universe can accomplish. If fishermen are wise, they will not allow their nets to entangle, or if they do accidentally get entangled, the work of extraction should be kindly and gently conducted. What a glad spectacle for men and angels when on our recent dedication day ministers of all denominations stood on this platform and wished for each other widest prosperity and usefulness, but there are cities in this country where there is now going on a awful ripping and rending and tearing of fishing nets. Indeed, all over Christendom at this time there is a great war going on between fishermen, ministers against ministers.

YOU MUST MEND YOUR OWN NET. Now I have noticed a man cannot fish and fight at the same time. He either neglects his net or his market. It is amazing how much time some of the fishermen have to look after other fishermen. It is more than I can do to take care of my own net. You see the wind is just right, and it is such a good time for fishing and the fish are coming in so rapidly that I have to keep my eyes and hand busy. There are about two hundred million souls waiting to get into the kingdom of God, and it will require all the nets and all the boats and all the fishermen of Christendom to safely land them.

At East Hampton, Long Island, where I am now, out on the bluff some fishermen we see the flags up, and that is the signal for launching out into the deep. For a mile the water is tinged with that peculiar color that indicates whole schools of placid and reverent, and the beach swarms with men with their coats off and their sea caps on, and those of us who do not go out on the wave stand on the beach ready to rejoice when the boats come back, and in our excitement we rush into the water with them, and we lay hold of the lines and pull till we are red in the face, and as the living things of the deep come tumbling in on the sand I cry out, "Captain, how many?" And he answers, "About fifty thousand." And we shout to the late comers, "Hurrah, fifty thousand!" We must have an enthusiasm something like that if we are ever to take the human race for God and master. We ought to have the enthusiasm of the beach multiplied a hundred fold and by so much as an immortal soul is worth more than a bluefish.

Oh, brethren of ministry! Let us spend our time in fishing instead of fighting. But if I angrily jerk my net across your net, and you jerk your net angrily across mine, we will soon have two broken nets and no fish. The French revolution nearly destroyed the French fisheries, and ecclesiastical war is the worst thing possible while hauling souls into the kingdom. I had hoped that the millennium was about to dawn, but the lion is yet too fond of the lamb. My friends, I notice in the text that James the son of Zebedee and John his brother were busy not mending somebody else's nets but mending their own nets, and I rather think that we who are engaged in Christian work in this latter part of the nineteenth century will require all our spare time to mend our nets. God help us in the important duty!

In this work of reparation we need to put into the nets more threads of common sense. When we can present religion as a great practicality we will catch a hundred souls where now we catch one. Present religion as an intellectuality and we will fail. Out in the fisheries there are set across the waters what are called gill nets, and the fish put their heads through the meshes and then cannot withdraw them because they are caught by the gills. But gill nets cannot be of any service in religious work. Men are never caught for the truth by their heads; it is by the heart or not at all. No argument ever saved a man, and no keen analysis ever brought a man into the kingdom of God. Heart work, not head work. Away with your gill nets! Sympathy, helpfulness, consolation, love, are the names of some of the threads that we need to weave in our gospel nets when we are mending them.

IF THE WORLD WOULD BELIEVE IT WOULD SURRENDER. Do you know that the world's heart is burning with trouble, and if you could make that world believe that the religion of Jesus Christ is a soothing omnipotence, the whole world would surrender tomorrow, yes, would surrender this hour? The day before James A. Garfield was inaugurated president I was in the car going from Richmond to Washington. A gentleman seated next to me in the car knew me, and we were soon in familiar conversation. It was just after a bereavement and he was speaking to him from an overburdened heart about the sorrow I was suffering.

Looking at his cheerful face, I said: "I guess you have escaped all trouble. I should judge from your countenance that you have come through free from all misfortune." Then he looked at me with a look I shall never forget and whispered in my ear: "Sir, you know nothing about trouble. My wife has been in an insane asylum for fifteen years." And then he turned and looked out of the window and into the night with a silence I was too overpowered to break. That was another illustration of the fact that no one escapes trouble. Why, that man seated next to you in church has on his soul a weight commensurate with which a mountain is a feather. That woman seated next to you in church has a grief the recital of which would make your body, mind and soul shudder.

When you are mending your net for this wide, deep sea of humanity, take out that wire thread of criticism and that horse-hair thread of harshness, and put in a soft silken thread of Christian sympathy. Yes, when you are mending your nets tear out those old threads of gruffness and weave in a few threads of politeness and civility. In the house of God let all the Christian faces beam with a look that means welcome. Say "good morning" to the stranger as he enters your pew, and at the close shake hands with him and say, "How do you like music?" Why, you would be to that man a panel of the door of heaven; you would be to him a note of the doxology that seraphs sing when a new soul enters. That man is a thousand miles from home, and he has just heard by telegraph that his child is sick with scarlet fever, and his boy at college has got into disgrace, and he has had business trouble and is so homesick he can hardly keep from crying. Just one word of brotherly kindness from you would lift him into a small heaven.

I have in other days entered a pew in church, and the woman at the other end of the pew looked at me as much as to say: "How dare you? This is my pew, and I pay the rent for it!" Well, I crouched in the other corner and made myself as small as possible, and felt as though I had been stealing something. So there are people who have a sharp edge to their religion, and they act as though they thought most people had been elected to be damned, and they were glad of it. Oh, let us brighten up our manner and appear in utmost gentleness and lowliness.

BE GENTLE. The object in fish fishing is to throw the fly far out, and then let it drop gently down and keep it gently rising and falling with the waters, and not plunge it like a man-of-war's anchor, and abruptness and harshness of manner must be avoided in our attempt at usefulness. I know a man in New York who is more sunny and genial when he has dyspepsia than when he is not suffering from that depressing trouble. I have heard of his secret. When he awakes out in the morning with such depression he asks for special grace to keep from snapping up anybody that day, and make faith additional determination to be

kindly and genial, and by the help of God he accomplishes it. Many of our nets need to be mended in these respects, the black threads and the rough threads take out, and the bright threads and the golden threads of Christian gentleness woven in. In addition to this we need to mend our nets with more threads of patience. It is no rare thing for a fisherman to spend one whole day before he can take a St. Lawrence pike or an Ohio salmon or a Long Island pickerel or a Cayuga black bass or a Delaware catfish, and he does that day after day without particular discouragement. But what a lack of patience if we do not immediately succeed in soul catching. We are apt to give it up and say, "I will never try again." Into all our nets we need to weave all along the edge and all through the center great, long, stout threads of Christian patience. How patient God has been with us! Can we not be patient with our fellows? I had presented me from Scotland a few days ago an ornamental island, the wooded parts of which were made from a piece of a tree cut down by Mr. Gladstone, at Harrow, and sent by him to Scotland by request.

The incident reminded me of the fact that a woman who had long been on Mr. Gladstone's estate had a wayward boy, and in her despair she asked Mr. Gladstone to take the boy in hand. While prime minister of England, with all the mighty affairs of the kingdom in his hand, he took that boy in his study and counseled him, and then knelt down and prayed with him, and the boy was saved. If we all had hearts of sympathy like that, what would be to us impossible? "Is it not delightful that I can sing so well?" said Jenny Lind, in a burst of joy that she could help others. "Is it not delightful that I can sing so well?" And might we not all say in thankfulness to God, "Is it not delightful that we can sympathize with others, and encourage others, and help others, and save others?"

Again, in mending our nets we need also to put in the threads of faith and tear out all the tangled meshes of unbelief. Our work is successful according to our faith. The man who believes in only half a Bible, or the Bible in spots; the man who thinks he cannot persuade others; the man who halts, doubting about this and about that, will be a failure in Christian work. Show me the man who rather thinks that the garden of Eden may have been an allegory, or that Jesus might not be God, or that there might be another chance after death, and does not know whether or not the Bible is inspired, and I tell you that man for soul saving is a poor stick. Faith in God and in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, and the absolute necessity of a regenerated heart in order to see God in peace, is one thread you must have in your mended net or you will never be a successful fisherman.

Why, how can you doubt? The hundreds of millions of men and women now standing in the church on earth, and the hundreds of millions in heaven, attest the power of this Gospel to save. With more than the certainty of a mathematical demonstration, let us start out to redeem all nations. The rotten thread that you are to tear out of your net is unbelief, and the most important thread that you are to put in it is faith. Faith in God, trust in his faith, everlasting faith. If you cannot trust the infinite, the holy, the omnipotent Jehovah, who can you trust?

IT IS AN IMPORTANT WORK. Oh, this important work of mending our nets! If we could get our nets right we would accomplish more in soul saving in the next year than we have in the last twenty years. But where shall we get them mended? Just where old Zebedee and his two boys mended their nets—where you are. James, why don't you put your net in Lake Galilee, or near your father and land at Capernaum, or Tiberias or Gadara, and seated on the bank mend your net? John, why don't you go ashore and mend your net? No, they sat on the guards of the boat, or at the prow of the boat, or in the stern of the boat, and they took up the thread and the needle, and the ropes and the wooden blocks, and went to work; sewing, sewing, tying, tying; weaving, weaving, putting, putting; mending, mending, they push it off into the sea and drop paddle and oar and sail, and the outwater went through amid the shoals of fish, some of the descendants of which we had for breakfast one morning while we were encamped on the beach of beautiful Galilee. James and John had no time to go ashore. They were not fishing for fun, as you and I do in summer time. It was their livelihood and that of their families. They mended their nets where they were, in the ship.

"Oh," says some one, "I mean to get my net mended, and I will go down to the public library, and I will see what the scientists say about evolution and about the survival of the fittest, and I will read up what the theologians say about 'advanced thought.' I will leave the ship awhile, and I will go ashore and stay there till my net is mended." Do that, my brother, and you will have no net left. Instead of their helping you mend your net, they will steal the pieces that remain. Better stay in the Gospel boat, where you have all the means for mending your net. What are they, do you ask? I answer all you need you have where you are, namely, a Bible and a place to pray. The more you study evolution, and adopt what is called advanced thought, the bigger fool you will be. Stay in the ship, mending your net. That is where James the son of Zebedee and John his brother staid. That is where all who get their nets mended stay.

THEY SEEK NOTORIETY. I notice that all who leave the Gospel boat and go ashore to mend their nets stay there. Or if they try again to fish, they do not catch anything. Get out of the Gospel boat and go up into the world to get your net mended, and you will be as the man who when you were well like the man who, having forsaken Christianity, sighed, "I would give a thousand pounds to rest as I did in 1830." The time will come when you will be willing to give a thousand pounds to feel as you did in 1830. These men who have given up their old religion cannot help you a bit. It is my opinion that the most of those ministers who gave up the old religion are in search of notoriety. They do not succeed in attracting much attention. They are tired of abstract attention, so they sit down on the beach and go to tearing to pieces the fishing nets instead of mending them. The staid old denominations to which they belong do not pay them enough attention, so they attract attention by striking their grandmothers. They do not get enough attention by working in the pious, so they go to work and break the church windows. These dear brethren of all denominations, afflicted with theological fidgets, had better go to mending nets instead of striking them. Before they break up the old religion let them go through some great sacrifice for God that will prove them worthy for such a work, taking the advice of Talleyrand: a man who wanted to spend the religion of Jesus Christ and start a new one, when he said, "Go and be crucified and then raise yourself from the grave the third day!" Those who propose to mend their nets by secular skeptical books are just like a man who has just one week for fishing, and six of the days he spends in reading Jack Walton's "Complete Angler," and "Whealey's" "Red and Lion," and Scott's "Fishing in Northern Waters," and Pullman's "Vade Mecum of Fish Fishing for Trout," and then on Saturday morning, his last day out, goes to the river to ply his art, but that day the fish will not bite, and late on Saturday night he goes home with empty baskets and a disappointed heart.

Meanwhile a man who never saw a big library in all his life has that week counted, and he accomplishes it. Many of our nets need to be mended in these respects, the black threads and the rough threads take out, and the bright threads and the golden threads of Christian gentleness woven in. In addition to this we need to mend our nets with more threads of patience. It is no rare thing for a fisherman to spend one whole day before he can take a St. Lawrence pike or an Ohio salmon or a Long Island pickerel or a Cayuga black bass or a Delaware catfish, and he does that day after day without particular discouragement. But what a lack of patience if we do not immediately succeed in soul catching. We are apt to give it up and say, "I will never try again." Into all our nets we need to weave all along the edge and all through the center great, long, stout threads of Christian patience. How patient God has been with us! Can we not be patient with our fellows? I had presented me from Scotland a few days ago an ornamental island, the wooded parts of which were made from a piece of a tree cut down by Mr. Gladstone, at Harrow, and sent by him to Scotland by request.

With an eye-opening scenic catch to supply his own table and the table of all his neighbors, and enough to salt down in barrels for the long winter that will soon come in. Alas! alas! If, when the Saturday night of our life drops on us, it shall be found that we have spent our time in the theories of worldly philosophy, trying to mend our nets, and we have only a few souls to report as brought to God through our instrumentality, while some humble Gospel fisherman, his library made up of a Bible and an almanac, shall come home laden with the trophies he trophies the souls within fifteen miles of his log cabin meeting house.

In the time of great disturbance in Naples in 1649 Massaniello, a bare footed fishing boy, dropped his fishing rod, and by strange magnetism took command of that city of six hundred thousand souls. He took off his fishing jacket and put on a robe of gold in the presence of howling mobs. He put his hand on his hip as a signal, and they were silent. He waved his hand away from him, and they retired to their homes. Armies passed in review before him. He became the nation's idol. The rapid rise and complete supremacy of that young fisherman, Massaniello, has no parallel in all history. But something equal to that and better than that is an everyday occurrence in heaven.

God takes some of those, who in this world were fishermen of men, and who toiled very humbly, but because of the way they mended their nets and employed their nets after they were mended, and suddenly boasts them and robes them and makes them rulers over many cities, and he marches armies of saved ones before them in review, Massaniello's unhonored on earth, but radiated in heaven. The fisher boy of Naples soon lost his power, but those people of God who kept their nets mended and their rightly swung them shall never lose their exalted place, but shall reign forever and ever. Keep that reward in sight.

SWEEP ALL THE SEAS. But do not spend your time fishing with hook and line. Why did not James the son of Zebedee sit on the wharf at Cana, his feet hanging over the lake and with a long pole and a worm on the hook dipped into the wave, wait for some mullet to swim up and be caught? Why did not Zebedee spend his afternoon trying to catch one eel? No, that work was too slow. These men were not mending a hook and line; they were mending their nets. So let the church of God not be content with having here one soul and next month another soul brought into the kingdom. Sweep all the seas with nets—scoop nets, seine nets, drag nets, all encompassing nets—and take the treasures in by hundreds and thousands and millions and nations be born in a day, and the hemispheres quake with the tread of a ransoming God. Do you know what will be the two most tremendous hours in our heavenly existence? Among the quadrillions of ages which shall roll on, what two occasions will be to us the greatest? The day of our arrival there will be to us one of the two greatest. The second greatest, I think, will be the day when we shall have put in parallel lines before what Christ did for us and what we did for Christ—the one so great, the other so little. That will be the only embarrassment in heaven. My Lord and my God! What will we do and what will we say when on one side are placed the Saviour's great sacrifices for us and our small sacrifices for him—his exile, his humiliation, his agonies on one hand, and our poor weak, insufficient sacrifices on the other? To make the loss overwhelming? Let us quickly mend our nets, and like the Galilean fishermen may we be divinely helped to cast them on the right side of the ship.

A Spanish Afternoon. A recent entertainment in a neighboring city was a "fex" which took the form of a "Spanish afternoon." Those calisthenic words, engraved on the invitations, aroused much curiosity, and almost every guest bidden found it possible to accept. On entering the handsome rooms were discovered to be beautifully decorated with yellow and red flowers, interspersed with Spanish flags, which were festooned upon the walls. The staircase was wound with the flags, and Spanish pictures and effects abounded. A paper was read upon "Cervantes, the Hero, the Poet and the Man," and during the reception which followed music from hidden ethers and guitars supplemented the conversation. The refreshments comprised as many Spanish delicacies as possible, and were served in Spanish style.

The affair was a great success, and is a suggestion to future hostesses. It would be easy to carry out the same idea in other nationalities, and an Italian, Swedish or Greek "afternoon" could be made equally effective and interesting.—Her Point of View in New York Times.

One Way of Expressing It. A curious display of anti-Italian sentiment was seen on Main street. A man of dignified appearance was passing along, when an Italian rag collector came by, bending under a heavy bag of rags. The man calmly picked a large stone from the gutter and chucked it at the Italian with a force which if it had hit the mark would have cleaved a hole in the rag picker's skull. He kept right on his way as if nothing had happened, looking neither to the right nor left, while the bewildered Italian, not knowing who had thrown the stone, turned and swore eloquently at an innocent boy.—Springfield Homestead.



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